



RACIAL SEGREGATION AS AN UMBRELLA CAUSE OF UNCANNY AND UNCONTROLLED EXPLOITATION INTERACTED IN STRANGE FRUIT OF LILLIAN SMITH

D. B. Wankhade

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of English, Shri Shivaji Arts, Commerce & Science College Akot, Dist. Akola (M.S.) India.

ABSTRACT

Lillian Eugenia Smith was an internationally acclaimed white southern writer in areas of economic, racial, and sexual discrimination during the 1930s and 1940s. Smith boldly and persistently called for an end to racial segregation, which reflects her personal knowledge and experience with the young black and white civil rights activists of the 1950s and 1960s. She became an outstanding innovative known for her analysis of southern culture, especially in understanding of the effects of child-nurturing practices on adult racial and sexual relationships.

Smith's first novel *Strange Fruit* was translated into several languages. It is an interesting insightful exploration of the interrelationship of race, class, and gender in southern society, brought strong criticism from more moderate southerners. Smith's concerns extended beyond race relations to encompass all aspects of human relationships in the modern world. *Strange fruit* is a complex psychological novel about the inevitable destruction in a community when the reality and power of the irrational are unacknowledged in human life. It is a tragic story of Nonnie Anderson, an aware young black woman in the Georgia, and the young white man, Tracy Deen, by whom she is violated. It is a critique of isolation and discrimination.

KEYWORDS: Racial Segregation, Exploitation, Inhuman Violation etc.

INTRODUCTION

Lillian Smith is a white novelist depicting the dark life of the Southern Blacks through her fictional art *Strange Fruit*. Both as a social critic and literary artist, Smith has touchingly tried to cement the interracial gaps with vigor words to acquaint the global reader with the harsh reality of manmade social inequalities. A sect of white writers in literatures in English has described the entire black skin people with bizarre and animosity of atmosphere. The historical perspective of one time Negro, now an African American people is filled with various human rights movements and agitation for the demand of equal status as an honored human alive with flesh and blood. Slavery, segregation, outcaste, backward, dark and so on is the terminology openly vested for the delineation of African American black race. The Harlem Renaissance was a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement that kindled a flame of new black cultural identity. Its essence was laid down in human struggle for equality.

Racial segregation is the separation of humans from other ethnic groups in daily life. It may apply to activities such as eating in a restaurant, drinking from a water fountain, using a public toilet, attending school, going to the movies, riding on a bus, or in the rental or purchase of a home or of hotel rooms. Racial separation is generally outlawed. Segregation may be maintained by means ranging from discrimination in hiring and in the rental and sale of housing to certain races to violence. In 1944, Smith published the bestselling novel *Strange Fruit* which dealt with the then prohibited and controversial theme of interracial romance. Smith sustained that the book had been a meeting or corresponding point with many southern blacks and liberal whites for years well aware of blacks' concerns.

Black people is a term used in certain countries, often in socially based systems of ethnicity, to describe persons who are supposed to be dark skinned compared to other given populations. It was earlier uttered as Negro; now in the connotation of stream of consciousness it is reshaped as African American or colored people. The American workplace is highly sexualized, mirroring a society where sexual bantering and flirtation are commonplace. The problem of sexual annoyance, however, goes far beyond such mutually agreeable contacts to situations where a woman is subjected to repeat and unwelcome sexual advances, derogatory statements based on her sex, or sexually demeaning gestures or acts. She is often made to feel degraded, ridiculed, or humiliated while he is working or threatened with adverse job consequences if she does not yield to sexual advances. The harassment takes an emotional, physical, and economic toll: women placed in this situation do not perform well on the job and often quit rather than continue to work in a threatening environment. Although sexual harassment has existed in the workplace since women entered the work force, it is only now coming into public view as a significant legal problem. The identification of sexual harassment as an important issue coincides with the rapid increase of women in the workforce and a related upsurge of feminist activities throughout the country. Women are feeling less powerless and are encouraging each other not to accept the harassment previously considered an unavoidable part of a woman's work life.

The novel *Strange Fruit* speaks about Nonnie Anderson, an exceptionally beautiful, bright, and talented, young, black young woman living in Maxwell, Georgia.

Her mother, now dead, insisted that all of her children go to college. Nonnie and her older sister, Bess, received degrees from Spelman College; her older brother, Ed, received a degree from Atlanta University. They went to college when most Maxwell residents, white or black, never even considered going to College. Ed, who has always hated Maxwell, moved to Washington, DC, where he has a good job. He is back in Maxwell for a specific purpose to take Nonnie back with him to Washington, DC. Even during his short visit, everything he experiences about Maxwell strengthens his hatred. Nonnie makes it very clear that she does not want to move away from Maxwell. When she tells Ed that she happy as she is, Ed says "But how can you be, living like this? Country slums, that's what it is, taking orders all day long from crackers dirt"

"Nonnie smiled into his angry face. 'I've always been happy, Ed, all my life. You never were or not often you and Bess. You're ambitious. I'm not. Sometimes I don't think contented people ever are.'"

Nonnie does not want to leave Maxwell is a white fellow, Tracy Deen, with whom she is in love. When Nonnie was six, she was attacked by an older white boy. Tracy objected him, and has been Nonnie's hero onwards. Tracy and Nonnie have been having an affair and Nonnie become pregnant. Nonnie tells Tracy that she is happy to keep her baby. Tracy's family is quite prosperous. His father Tutweiler Dean is a dedicated physician. He also owns other businesses including the town's drug store. He would be happy to help Tracy get a start in life, but Tracy has always been a disappointment to his family and, especially, to his mother. He failed out of college and jobless, even the job his father gives him running the drug store, is futile. His parents are eager to marriage him with the right girl, Dorothy Pusey, who lives across the street, will amend Tracy out. They don't know about Tracy's relationship with Nonnie. One of Tracy's best friends is Henry, who is the same age as Tracy and with whom he grew up. Henry, who is black, stayed at the Deen home when his parents moved away for a better opportunity. His mother had been a servant in the Deen household for many years. Henry lives in the cabin, in the Deen's backyard, in which his family had lived.

Tracy is in quite a quandary because he has, finally, succumbed to all the pressure in town, from parents, the preacher, and the neighbors, to ask Dorothy to marry him. But, now, what to do about Nonnie? He comes up with the scheme of paying Henry to marry her. Henry has been besotted with Nonnie all his life. Henry received money from Tracy to marry with Nonnie. But, Nonnie doesn't like the idea at all! Ultimately, Nonnie's family finds out that she is pregnant, that she wants to keep the baby, and that Tracy is the father. Her brother, Ed, becomes enraged and shoots Tracy, killing him. Sam, a life-long family friend of the Anderson's, who is a physician and who owns a car, drives Ed, in the middle of the night, to Macon, where he catches a train to NYC.

Apart from the color of their skin, there is nothing salacious about this romance. The two meet as children, after Tracy defends Non from a local bully, and intensifies when he returns from World War I. Smith enters the minds of more than a dozen residents of Maxwell, Georgia, both white and black, creating a vivid anatomy of the town's racial geography. To heighten the novel's sense of immediacy the sense the reader has of being among these characters, in Maxwell, as the

action occurs Smith often turns to stream-of-consciousness prose punctuated by ellipses and sentence fragments meant to imitate the stuttering machinery of our thoughts. In moments of particularly heightened introspection she even shifts to the second person, as in a scene in which Non's older brother, Ed, recalls his own painful childhood:

The real power of Smith's novel lies in her depiction of the grotesque manner in which racism deforms its perpetrators. After an intercession by the local priest, Tracy renounces his love for Nonie and surrenders to his mother's desire for him to marry his neighbor's daughter, a timid, bland girl for whom he has no feeling. The scenario allows Smith to rail against the sickening hypocrisy of organized religion, the casual racism of even the most progressive white Southerners, and the primitive joy that washes over the townspeople decent Christian mothers and fathers, and their young children while watching a black man burned at the stake.

It is not forbidden in this cultural setting for a white man to have a sexual relationship with a black woman. What is taboo is for him to love her as Tracy loves Nonnie. It causes them both what is ultimately unbearable unhappiness: Tracy loses his life and Nonnie loses her brother. The novel focuses on the relationship between a black woman and a white man at a time during which that type of relationship was not accepted. As the white man seeks acceptance from his family he breaks off the relationship but his attempt to provide for the now-pregnant girl has unforeseen and terrible consequences.

In *Strange Fruit*, Smith attempted to untangle and expose the web of white racism, gender, class, religion, and myriad traditions she thought had put a strait-jacket on what her contemporary admire, 'the mind of the South.' She was the first white southerner of any prominence to denounce not just racism and segregation. Lillian Smith was earnest and idealistic, more a social critic than a novelist. She never missed a chance to denounce the corrosiveness of traditions, whether expressed by a dimwitted racist, such as Preacher Dunwoodie, or by Nonnie's angry older brother, who resorts to murder and brings on unintended tragedy.

Smith deeply resented criticism from prominent white moderates. Smith's attitude toward the novel also seemed to change over time. She said her novel was not about race, but instead was a fantasy in which she was every character. Whatever else it might be, *Strange Fruit* is about relationships, crossing lines, breaking rules, being different, rejecting prescribed rules, transcending categories, and those "racial abstractions" that Smith often said existed only to divide and conquer and corrupt their victims. Thus *Strange Fruit* is an embodiment of inhuman elements which narrates the grudge and narrow nature of the whites about the blacks. The thematic canvass of the novel is universal.

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